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ABSTRACT

This lesson describes the current government of Hungary and its underlying political and electoral systems. The lesson is structured with: (1) background on the parliamentary model of government, political parties, and Hungary's unique electoral system; (2) a summary of the six major political parties in Hungary and voter information for the 1990 and 1994 elections; and (3) conclusions about the fluidity of the electoral system in Hungary and comparisons with the U.S. electoral process. (EH)

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Lesson Plan on Comparative Political Systems: Compare and Contrast the Presidential Election System of the USA to the Parliamentary Election System of Hungary.

by Daniel W. O'Connell

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LESSON PLAN ON COMPARATIVE POLITICAL SYSTEMS:
Compare and Contrast the Presidential Election System of the USA
to the Parliamentary Election System of Hungary
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July, 1996

INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this lesson plan is to describe the current government of Hungary and its underlying political and electoral systems. In order to understand the government of Hungary you must first understand the parliamentary model of government; but to understand Hungary's Parliament, or National Assembly, you need to understand its system of political parties; but to understand the role of political parties you must start with Hungary's unique electoral system. The underlying teaching concept is the importance of the electoral or voting system in determining the outcome of elections and how governments operate. The importance of analyzing the operation and political consequences of an electoral system is further explained by Arend Lijphart:

> Except in very small communities, democracy necessarily means *representative* democracy in which elected officials make decisions on behalf of the people. How are these representatives elected? This indispensable task in representative democracies is performed by the electoral system--the set of methods for translating the citizens' votes into representatives' seats. Thus the electoral system is the most fundamental element of representative democracy (1).

To understand this point ask whether it makes a difference whether you directly elect the President of the United States or elect the President through the Electoral College system designed in the late 1700's?

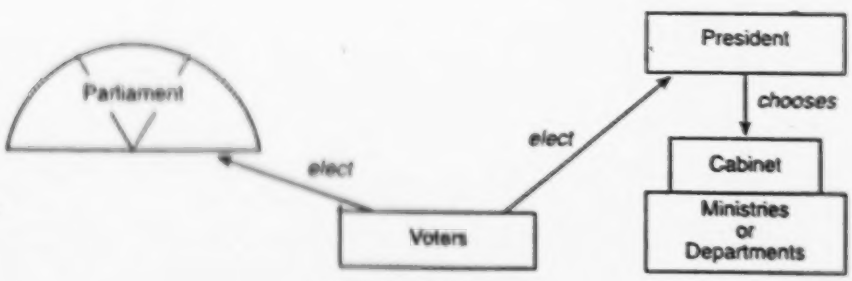
A Comparative Model: To fully understand and appreciate the details of any government structure you need to use a comprehensive comparative theory such as the one presented by Michael Roskin in his Comparative Politics Textbook (1995). Roskin presents and follows a five part analysis for each country he studies:

1. The impact of the past, including geography, history, and religion.
2. The key institutions.
3. Political attitudes.
4. Patterns of interaction.
5. What people quarrel about.

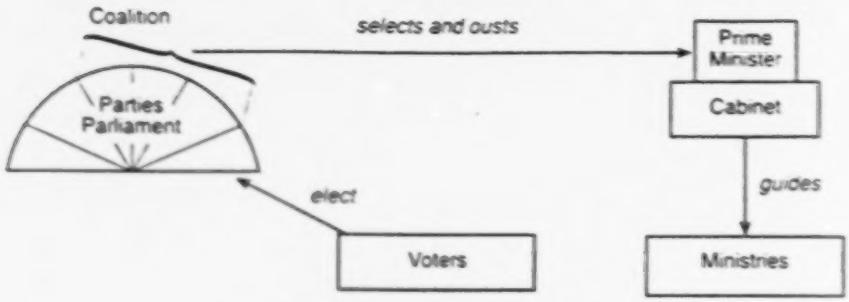
History of Governments: Like most countries, Hungary has had many forms of government during its life as a nation-state (Hoensch). The Hungarian state began in AD 1000 when the pope crowned Stephen I as King. The feudal monarchy was transformed into a constitutional monarchy as a result of the revolution of 1848. Following the second World War, Act 1 of 1946 proclaimed Hungary to be a republic. The Communist Party, however, gained power and in 1949 adopted a constitution following the Soviet model of a "people's republic." The "dictatorship of the proletariat" was instituted with the building of a socialism as its goal. Instead of free elections closed-list elections ensured the Communist Party retained its power.

In 1956 a popular uprising against the Communist regime was crushed by Soviet troops and the revolutionary government leaders were executed. From 1956-1988 the Communist regime carried out a "soft dictatorship," but demands for reforms, including a multi-party system continued. By 1988 major changes were underway. The single party system ceased to exist and various parties were founded. In 1989 the constitution was amended to set up a Constitutional Court. New laws established the right of combination and assembly and the right to strike. The Constitution was further amended to drop the word "peoples" from the "Republic of Hungary." A parliamentary form of government was also established.

This lesson will concentrate on the new electoral and party systems and show how they operated during the elections of 1990 and 1994. Other lessons plans are being prepared on the Constitutional Court, the operation of Parliament, and other aspects of Hungarian life today. Before proceeding to Hungary's electoral system let's review the basic difference between a presidential and a parliamentary system (Roskin 8)



A Presidential System



A Parliamentary System

Presidential or Parliamentary: Presidential democracies clearly show the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. The president is not a figurehead, but functions as the head of government. In parliamentary systems, the head of state (figurehead monarch or weak president) is a separate office from the head of government. The head of government in a parliamentary democracy (prime minister, premier, or chancellor) is the important and powerful figure. In parliamentary systems the voters elect only a legislature; the legislature then elects an executive from its own ranks. Hungary's Parliament, the National Assembly, is a single-chamber body elected for four years and has 386 members. The National Assembly elects the President of the Republic (head of state), the Prime Minister (head of government), the members of the Constitutional Court, the Ombudsman, the President of the Supreme Court, and the Procurator General.

To understand the functioning of the Hungarian National Assembly and the selection of Prime Minister, we must back up and look at the design and functioning of Hungary's unique election system.

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: To begin, understand that Hungary did not follow the American political model. It selected a parliamentary not a presidential system. It also did not adopt our election system. It combined elements of the French, German, and Austrian systems (Berglund 185).

To understand presidential politics and elections in the USA you must know the constitutional provisions on the Electoral College. Likewise in Hungary and other parliamentary systems you must understand the details of its electoral system. Six voting methods are shown on the next page.

Voting Methods around the World

Winner-take-all

The most votes wins (can be a majority requirement)

United States
Great Britain
Canada
India
many former British colonies
Australia
France
South Africa *(pre-1993)*

Limited Voting (LV)

Vote for fewer than number of candidates to be elected; highest vote-getters win

Japan *(pre-1994)*
Used in many U.S. localities
Adopted in some voting-rights settlements

Cumulative Voting (CV)

Give multiple votes to one candidate; highest vote-getters win

Peoria, IL
Chilton County, AL
Alamogordo, NM
Sisseton, SD
Adopted in several other voting-rights settlements
IL legislature *(1870-1980)*
SC legislature *(during Reconstruction)*

Preference Voting (PV)

Rank candidates in order of preference; candidates win by reaching a threshold of top-ranked votes; surplus votes transferred to next-ranked candidates

Ireland, Malta, Tasmania, Australian upper chamber; Cambridge, MA; has been used by 22 U.S. cities including New York, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Sacramento, Boulder

Mixed Member PR (MMP)

*Some seats elected from single-member districts; some from party lists (usually half and half); seats awarded proportionally based on party-list vote with district seats counted toward a party's total**

Germany
New Zealand *(post 1994)*

**Systems recently adopted by Russia, Mexico, Japan, and Italy are less proportional, so votes are less effective.*

Party-list PR

Ballots cast for a party's list of candidates; seats awarded based on percent of vote; some systems allow voting for candidates on the party list

Most West European, Latin American, and former Soviet bloc countries; Israel
South Africa *(4/94)*

least effective vote

How effective is your vote?

most effective vote

Find the USA and Hungary on this chart. You are right, Hungary is not listed. It is in the general category called Mixed Member PR (MMP), but as mentioned above it combined in 1989 elements of the French, Germany, and Austrian systems.

Note two electoral concepts, PR and Multi-seat districts. PR or proportional representation describes a voting system in which voters win representation in proportion to the voting preferences of the electorate. 20% of votes means 2 (20%) of 10 seats, 57% of votes means 6 (60%) of 10 seats. The term multi-seat districts describes an electoral constituency with more than one representative, in contrast to single-seat districts, where one winner "represents" all. If a legislature keeps its current size, conversion to PR results in a fewer number of larger, multi-seat districts.

Hungary's Electoral System: The Hungarian system is a dual vote system, that is, every person entitled to vote casts two votes. They cast one for a candidate in an individual constituency and the other for one of the territorial or county party lists (Hungary 4). Of the 386 parliamentary representatives, 176 are elected in individual constituencies and 152 on county (metropolitan lists).

County Party Lists: In Hungary every county and the capital city, Budapest, represent a territorial constituency. In the twenty constituencies, it is up to parties to decide whom they want to put up as candidates on their own party lists. However, only legally registered parties may put up territorial lists, and only if they put up candidates in one quarter of the individual constituencies in the county, or in a least two individual constituencies.

Voting for the lists is a one-round event, as the mandates are assigned to the candidates of party lists in proportion to the votes cast. Before the distribution of mandates, however, a declaration is made after the votes are counted, of those parties that have not received 5% of the total vote on nationwide lists (the threshold necessary for getting into Parliament). In 1990, this was set at only 4%; both then and in 1994 six parties reached the threshold. The parties not reaching 5% cannot obtain mandates on either their territorial or national lists. This restriction does not affect the individual mandate of the representative supported by a party in an individual constituency.

Individual Constituencies: The Hungarian voting system features a peculiarity, the so-called nomination system. Individuals must collect a

specified number of nominations--currently 750. These nominations bear the personal particulars of the citizens offering their recommendations.

The election for individual constituencies is on a two-round system. An election is valid if more than half of those entitled to vote have cast their votes, and the first round may elect a candidate if that candidate obtains more than half of the valid votes. However, an absolute majority is very rare. In the latest elections in 1994, only two candidates obtained a seat in the first round. If the first round is valid but produces no result, candidates who received at least 15% of the votes may go on to the second round. Should no candidate do so, then the three candidates who obtained the most votes go to the second round. In the second round, the candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat, provided at least one quarter of those entitled to vote turned out to vote.

National List of Parties: As mentioned above 176 parliamentary representatives are elected in individual constituencies and 152 on county party lists. An additional 58 representatives obtain mandates on the basis of votes transferred in support of national lists of parties. The voters do not cast votes for these national lists. They are set up by parties that have county lists in a least seven counties. Fourteen parties had national lists (Kiraly 131). Mandates deriving from the national lists are distributed among parties in proportion to the votes they gathered. The national lists have the function of complementing and proportioning the vote.

HUNGARY'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN PRACTICE, 1990 AND 1994:

Political Parties: Before describing the final output of the electoral system, a brief summary of the competing political parties is necessary. On the eve of the first democratic multi-party elections in 1990, sixty-five organizations fulfilled the legal requirements for becoming political parties (Kiraly 107). After the nominations (recall 750 nomination petitions are necessary for putting up a candidate), twenty-eight parties survived out of the original 65. Only 6 parties cleared the final hurdle as the following chart shows (Kiraly 108):

Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, March 25—April 9, 1990

Turnout: First round—65.1%, second round—45.5%

	Votes (in %) 1st round	Seats single member districts	Seats lists	Seats nat. list	Total	(and %)
MDF	24.73	2+112	40	10	164	(42.5)
SZDSZ	21.39	35	34	23	92	(23.8)
FKGP	11.73	11	16	17	44	(11.4)
MSZP	10.89	1+0	14	18	33	(8.6)
FIDESZ	8.95	1	8	12	21	(5.4)
KDNP	6.46	3	8	10	21	(5.4)
MSZMP	3.68	0	0	0	0	
MSZDP	3.55	0	0	0	0	
ASZ	3.13	1	0	0	1	(0.3)
LPSZ-VP	1.89	0	0	0	0	
HVK	1.87	0	0	0	0	
Candidates endorsed by various parties	3.50	0	4	0	4	(1.0)
Independents	2.93	2	4	0	6	(1.6)
All non-represented parties	10.99	0	0	0	0	

A summary of these six major parties follows (Kiraly 499):

FIDESZ (5.4%): Federation of Young Democrats, the junior liberal party, established in March 1988. The only party among the parliamentary parties that has been continuously in opposition since 1990. Member of the Liberal International. In April 1995 the party changed its name to FIDESZ-MPP (FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Party). Party Leader since 1993 is Viktor Orban.

FKGP (11.4%): Independent Smallholders' Party, an agrarian, populist party, (re)established in November 1988. Between 1990 and 1992 it was a junior partner with the MDF in the coalition. In February 1992 the party, led by Jozsef Torgyan, left the governing coalition. Nevertheless, most of its MPs, individually, remained in the government, and because of this they were expelled from the party. After the 1994 elections the party remained in opposition.

KDNP (5.4%): Christian Democratic People's Party, a Christian-conservative party, (re)established in March 1989. Between 1990 and 1994 it was a junior partner with the MDF in the governing coalition. Since 1994 the party has been in opposition. Member of the European Democratic Union. Party leader since 1995 is Gyorgy Giczy.

MDF (42.5%): Hungarian Democratic Forum, right-of-center conservative party, established as a political organization in September 1988. Between 1990 and 1994 it was the senior partner with KDNP and FKGP (until 1992) in the governing coalition. Since 1994 it has been the largest opposition party. Member of the European Democratic Union. Party leader since 1994 is Lajos Fur.

MSZP (8.6%): Hungarian Socialist Party, the legal successor of the Communist party (MSZMP), established in October 1989 with a social democratic profile. Between 1990 and 1994 the party was in opposition, but since the 1994 election it has been the senior partner in the governing coalition, with absolute majority of seats (54%) in the parliament. Member of the Socialist International. Party leader since 1990 is Gyula Horn.

SZDSZ (23.8%): Alliance of Free Democrats, the senior liberal party, established in November 1988, when the Network of Free Initiatives changed its name to SZDSZ. Between 1990 and 1994 it was the largest opposition party, and since 1994 has been junior partner with the MSZP in the governing coalition. Member of the Liberal International. Party leader since 1992 is Ivan Peto.

The 1990 Election: The first free Hungarian parliamentary elections since 1947 took place on 25 March (first round) and 8 April 1990 (second round). With the average of eight to nine candidates in each constituency and the fifty per cent plus one rule, few won seats in the first round. Run-off elections were required for 171 of the 176 electoral districts. The final results, shown in the previous chart, testify to the decisive defeat of the left and dissatisfaction with the former communist regime. It is also important to observe the operation of coalitions in multi-party elections. The MDF and SZDSZ could have formed a grand coalition to campaign in the second round, but they were too far apart politically. MDF decided to align itself with the FKGP and KDNP, who represented the same traditional values. In the end this gave them almost 60% of the deputies in the National Assembly.

In practice Hungary's electoral law reduced the number of parties to six. It also produced an extreme disproportionality of votes to seats. MDF, the largest party, won 42.5% of the parliamentary seats with 24.73% of the party list vote. This has been referred to as "Hungary's manufactured majorities" (Center for Voting and Democracy 199). Andrew Arato explained that "the real aim of some of the built-in disproportionality of the mixed system was supposed to enhance governability...avoid fragmentation...[and] enable relatively few parties to form a coalition..." (Kiraly 118). In other words, the mixed system of voting in Hungary purposely exaggerates the advantage of the strongest party.

The 1994 Election: Four years after its defeat the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) won an overwhelming victory. This shift to the left had many causes, including dissatisfaction with the economic policies of the government coalition led by MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum), its attempt to control the media, its slowness to distance itself from extremist and anti-Semitic statements, the death of Prime Minister Jozsef Antall, and intra-party rivalries and dissension (Center 196, Kiraly 9).

As in 1990 the electoral system had an impact. The following chart compares the results of the 1990 and 1994 elections (Kiraly 133).

The distribution of parliamentary seats as a result of the elections of March 25-April 8, 1990, and of May 8-29, 1994.
(Regarding the electoral system, see note 6.)

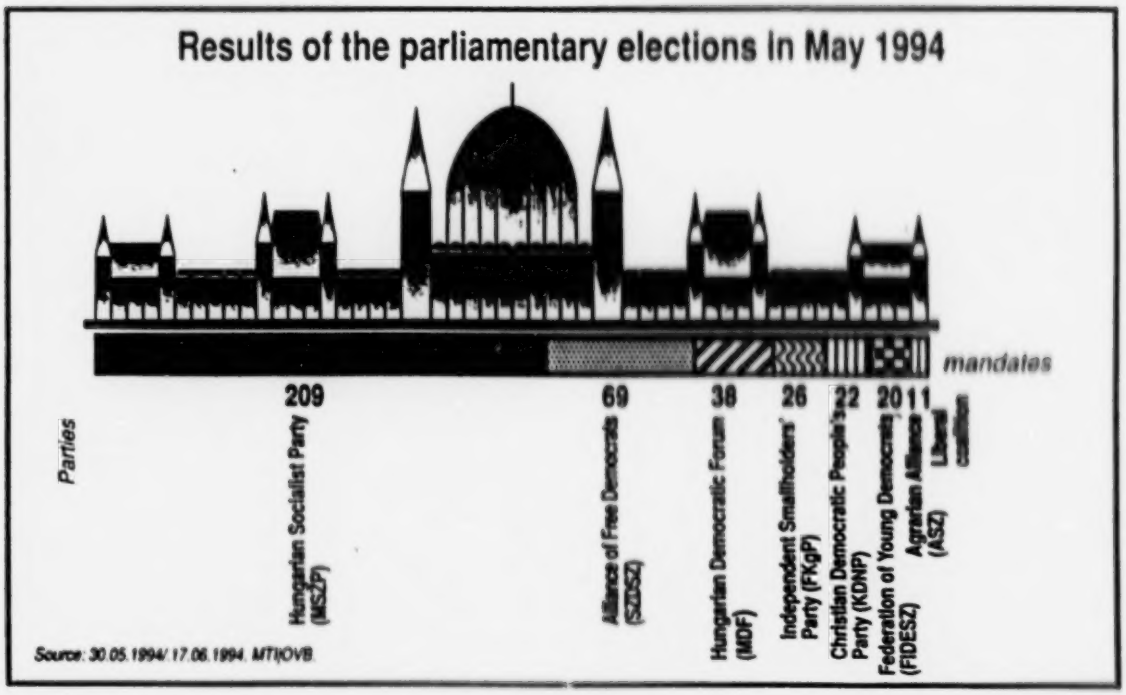
Party	Single Member Seats		Regional List Seats		Compensatory Mandates		Total Seats 1990		Total Seats 1994	
	1990	1994	1990	1994	1990	1994	N	%	N	%
MDF	114	5	40	18	10	15	164	42.5	38	9.8
SZDSZ	35	16	34	28	23	25	92	23.8	69	17.9
FKGP	11	1	16	14	17	11	44	11.4	26	6.7
MSZP	1	149	14	53	18	7	33	8.5	209	54.1
FIDESZ	1	0	8	7	12	13	21	5.4	20	5.2
KDNP	3	3	8	5	10	14	21	5.4	22	5.7
ASZ	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0.5	1	0.3
Independent	6	0					6	1.6	0	0.0
Other*	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	0.8	1	0.3

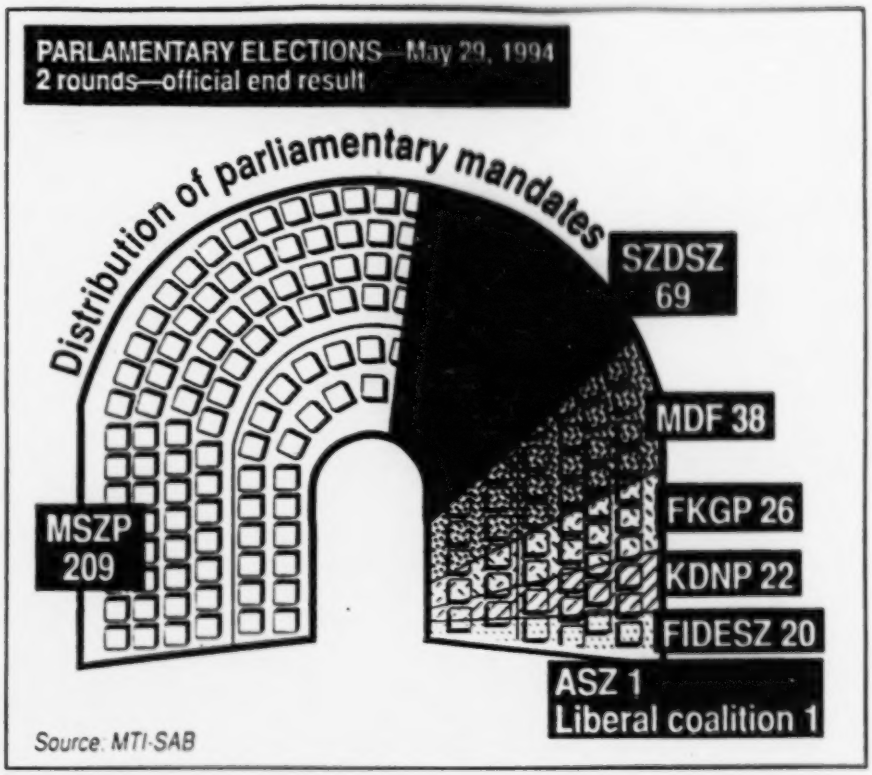
* "Other" candidates who have obtained seats were sponsored jointly by FIDESZ and the SZDSZ (in a few cases, by smaller parties as well).

MSZP increased its share of seats from 33 to 209, giving it an overall majority in the National Assembly. MDF, which led the governing coalition from 1990 to 1994, fell from 164 to 38 seats. The results again showed an extreme disproportionality of votes to seats. MSZP won 33% of the party list vote, but 54.1% of the seats. MSZP recognizing a potential legitimacy problem formed a coalition with SZDSZ, which gave the government control of 72% of seats in the National Assembly. Thomas Lundberg explained:

> Hungarian society probably is more pluralistic that the composition of its parliament leads one to believe, which helps explain why the Socialist Party chose to from a coalition government despite its majority (the party asked the economically liberal Alliance of Free Democrats to join the government, in part to reassure potential investors). (Center 199)

Two additional charts help visualize the connection between the electoral system, political parties, and parliament (Hungary 4, 5).





SUMMARY: In order to understand a political system, presidential or parliamentary, you must first look at its electoral and party systems. This lesson reviewed Hungary's unique electoral system. It is a Mixed Member PR system. In operation it narrows the number of parties elected to Parliament, benefits large and established parties, and produces an exaggerated voting advantage to the strongest party. Both governments since 1990 have been multi-party coalition governments.

The next general election is in 1998. The flip-flop effect of the 1990 and 1994 elections, from a center-right to a center -left government suggests that the party system is still fluid in Hungary. The number of active parties in Parliament increased to seven in March due to a split within the MDF. Disgruntled moderates inside this opposition party left to form a new party, the Hungarian Democratic People's Party (MDNP); (Peto).

There has been some discussion about changing the electoral law to abolish the second electoral round, but keeping a mixed system and taking

proportionality into account (Kiraly, 126). The key point of the lesson remains that the electoral system is the critical system to review in order to understand the party system as well as representation in the National Assembly.

A final note on the relevance of this lesson in the USA. There is no movement to amend the constitution to change from a presidential to a parliamentary system. There is, however, an active movement in the USA to change our dominant winner-take-all system and move towards more proportional voting systems at the local, state, and national level of government (Center, Voting and Democracy Review). Thus, lessons on other voting systems will help us recognize and appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of our current USA elections systems.

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